

Your Teaching Beliefs. What Would You Do?”

It is very easy to “believe” one thing but then quite difficult to make those beliefs central to what happens in your own classroom.

Read these scenarios and discuss what you would do in each case. Be prepared to argue your case in class.

Scenario 1: You aim to promote a whole-class discussion in the classroom as part of an activity designed to improve students’ speaking skills. You want to involve students in the discussion by asking questions. However, you realize that students resort to short answers such as ‘yes’, ‘no’ or one-word responses. How would you react in this situation? Why?

Reflection: Are your students ready for free response and conversation? Maybe you should use more controlled language production activities. Maybe your students feel anxious – how can you lower their affective filter? Did you model the activity well enough so students understood what they had to do? Did you dominate the conversation too much and not allow enough wait time or proper turn taking?

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Scenario 2: You are in the middle of a discussion of one fascinating topic with the whole class. Students are very engaged in the discussion and are taking turns in expressing their opinions on the matter. Suddenly, one of the students raises his/her hand and asks – Teacher, I want to add my own opinion to the discussion but I’m afraid I can’t do it in English. May I say it in? How would react in this situation? Why?

Reflection: What is more important at that moment – meaning or the activity? Is there some administrative or institutional reason that at times students can’t use their L1? Do you believe students should be able to use their L1 in class and it helps them even with speaking activities?

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Scenario 3: Today you employed a communicative activity in the classroom which mainly involved a teacher-student interaction. However, you were not able to involve every student in the activity because of the limited time available. After the lesson ended, a couple of students approached you and said they were upset. What do you think you should have done to involve all the learners in the activity?

Reflection: Do you believe that it is more important for students to interact with the teacher (a more competent English language speaker) or with peers when it comes to speaking activities? Would you explain to the students that it is important that they learn by speaking with their peers and not just the teacher? Do you model this in your classroom?

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Scenario 4: Imagine a situation in a foreign language class where a teacher comes in, stares at the class and says ‘Today we’re going to talk about traffic problems. What do you think?’ Following the teacher’s question, the students look down at their tables, make faces at each other and keep silent. How would you encourage students to speak in this situation?

Reflection: Have you given the students some say over speaking and discussion topics – engaged them in the curriculum development process? Could you use a “hook” and capture student interest in the topic and get them excited? Does the grouping or seating arrangement in the class have any effect on their enthusiasm for speaking on the topic or speaking in general.

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Scenario 5: Below is a question that you might hear from a student. How would you answer it? Why? - “Teacher, I try to speak a lot in English whenever I get the chance in the classroom but you never seem to correct my mistakes. Do you think I’ll ever improve this way?”

Reflection: Do you believe that fluency is more important than accuracy in the classroom? Did you explain this to your students – their need to not worry about over correction by the teacher? Might you suggest other ways the student can get corrective feedback outside of the teacher? Involve other students, recording?

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Scenario 6: One of your students approaches you after a class and asks – ‘Teacher, I really want to improve my speaking skills and I am prepared to do some extra work to achieve that. What do you think I should be doing?’ What would you suggest your student in such a case? Why?

Reflection: Does your student have technology at home or access at school for online tools that you might suggest? What other options might you provide to this student?

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Scenario 7: You have divided students into groups in order to start a discussion in the classroom, when a student turns to you and says – ‘Teacher, I don’t think we need to practice speaking because there are no speaking tests in the state exams. We can learn to speak later.’ How would you react to such statement? Why?

Reflection: Do you explain and promote in class how important English is as a lingua franca? Can you argue that speaking also fosters other language skills and will benefit the student regardless, on the state exam?